
COLONIZATION OF DEFECTIVES.*

BY A. C. ROGERS, M. D.,

FARIBAULT.

In a recent conversation with the Hon. Commissioner of Education I ventured to suggest that the reports of the Department would afford an excellent means for disseminating information concerning the permanent sequestration of defectives. He approved of the idea so far as the use of the reports were concerned, but was not ready to agree with the main proposition, because such sequestration would involve taking such defectives from their natural homes. This objection is a natural one, and indicates a proper appreciation of the pre-eminence of the natural home as the place for children, but it indicates on the other hand

*Read at the 35th annual meeting of the Minnesota State Medical Society at St. Paul June 19, 1903.

how little the fact is recognized that the natural home, as a rule, is not the place for a defective child.

The reasons, however, are not far to seek. The defective child is out of harmony with all the ordinary requirements of childhood. Its activities, mental and physical, are either too slow or are spasmodic and illy directed to avoid irritating contact with the other individuals of the family. Thus the best possibilities of the child are not developed. Experience is constantly demonstrating this fact. This also is true despite the fact that a public institution, even under the most perfect organization possible, falls short of many elements that typify the normal home, and is looked upon by the pupils and patients as well as their friends as a temporary stopping place; that, in the majority of cases an attempt to go out into the world and make an independent living, results in failure and a return to the institution guardianship. It is then a well established conclusion that both the training and the after care and guardianship of the feeble-minded, as a class, are best accomplished by an institution organized for these purposes rather than by the natural family.

This leads us to the consideration briefly of the general character of the institution that must take the place of the family.

It may be laid down as a fundamental principle of institution organization that the equipments and methods provided for the betterment of any class of defectives should be planned with special reference to the requirements of the most improvable members of the class. To be explicit—a school for the feeble-minded should make the educational idea the predominant one, even though a large percentage of the pupils may not be capable of much or any improvement. The hospital for epileptics and the hospital for insane should provide the very best means and methods known to science for the curative treatment of these patients, though there may be a large percentage not susceptible of cure. Then when all has been done that can be, there are still a large number of people whose conditions cannot be improved to any marked degree, yet who must be cared for permanently. This has long since led, in the matter of the feeble-minded, and in some states the same is true of the insane, to the establishment of buildings for this less improvable class, separate and apart from school or hospital centers respectively. This arrangement when all are connected with a general institution, represents the colonizing principle in its simplest form. In the institution for epileptics the

incompatibility of temperament, the irritability of disposition in many cases, and in many others in whom the disease has not progressed sufficiently to cause marked mental deterioration, the love for quiet, small-family home life, renders the necessity for the establishment of small, detached groups suited to these respective conditions, imperative, so that the term "Colony" for epileptics, has become quite well established for an organization that might very well be termed a village community, as the groups, while separated, are all on the same tract of land, the most widely separated ones being less, perhaps, than a mile or so, apart. The matter of providing future homes for the trained feeble-minded has presented a new problem for the solution of which the "Colony" plan (proper) suggests a remedy. During the years of training, economical reasons suggest the necessity of congregating the people. Thus the expensive equipment for training is available to a large number. The corps of teachers and nurses co-ordinate in their professional duties, hospital accommodations are convenient, the matter of parental visitations during the years of greatest anxiety and solicitude on the part of the parents, is easily and satisfactorily accomplished. The more unmanageable readily fall into the routine of institutional discipline, regular hours and regular diet, and yield obedience without apparent consciousness of restriction or coercion. Habits are improved, self-control developed, occupation of a useful nature acquired, and the defective youth brought to the practical limit of improvement; and yet, alas, in most cases, fall short of that degree of development that will permit of their discharge from the institution. For the boys who reach this stage there is limited employment around the training and custodial departments as printers, assistants in laundries, carpenters, gardeners, messenger boys, teamsters, etc., but the great majority of them are best fitted to do and happiest in the simple operations of a regular farm and garden life. Most institutions for the feeble-minded, however, have started out with insufficient land to meet their later necessities in this respect. And they have often, too, been located so near a town or city that the price of an extensive tract of land has prohibited its purchase when it was most needed.

We have then the following conditions, namely, 1st. A body of defectives, trained to the capacity of industrial usefulness (under intelligent and trained leaders) whose minds though broadened and responsive to the higher influences of love and sym-

pathy, which are both imparted and received, manifest simple wants that are easily supplied:—a body of people whose happy usefulness is best maintained, when the climatic conditions are suitable, by an active life upon the farm. 2nd. Institutions overcrowded from the accumulation of this class, debarring the admission of other children for which continually increasing pressure is brought to bear. 3d. The impossibility, generally, of procuring extensive land additions in the immediate vicinity of the institution, except at prices that practically prohibit purchase. 4th. The embarrassment of the thoughtful legislators who recognize the wisdom as a broad, economic social policy of permanent sequestration of defectives, yet whose dreams of the necessity of the equipments for its accomplishments, are interrupted by the constantly recurring nightmare concerning the expense involved when measured by that of the training schools.

Now, if it were possible to colonize such people at a distance from the training school, where cheap lands are available,—and such lands suitable for the purpose are available in many sections of every state—it is perfectly feasible to acquire at a very reasonable cost, suitable homes for all feeble-minded for whom they may be required.

Some of the men interested in the care of the feeble-minded have during the last few years, given considerable thought to the solution of this problem of colonization at a distance from the parent institution, and it has fallen to Massachusetts to try the experiment. The state has purchased for its School for Feeble-minded at Waverley 2,000 acres of cheap land, located 61 miles from the parent institution and has already established on it three colony groups of about 50 boys each, the two extreme groups being separated by two miles. These boys live amidst simple, plain environments and in almost primitive, yet comfortable style. DR. FERNALD is there making a practical demonstration of the possibility of carrying out the plan above indicated, in a manner both economical to the State and conducive to the best interests and happiness of the boys themselves. The plan is economical because of the simplicity of the equipment required. There is no necessity here for expensive buildings, like schools and hospitals, with their necessary apparatus. Plain structures, and simple personal organizations that represent the home ideas in the simplest form, with the wholesome occupations of farming, gardening and stock raising for the days, recreations, readings, and ap-

propriate home amusements for the evenings, and occasional holidays, supply, he claims, the needs of such a family. In fact, the Doctor states that the boys of the colonies are the happiest and most contented portion of his institution. He properly lays great stress, however, upon the necessity of providing a good library for the colony groups and the system and regularity with which the reading clubs, recreations and entertainments are carried on under the direction of an enthusiastic caretaker, who reports daily an itemized statement of the character and extent of these exercises. These reports include the names of the books or stories read, and even the names and character of the games played, during the preceding evening or holiday.

It is of course essential to the working of this plan that there be ready means, not only for intercommunication, but transportation between the parent institution and the colony groups. I want to emphasize also two other essentials, namely, 1st. These groups must consist of the trained workers from the school. 2nd. They must be attended by trained people. One of the most common fallacies concerning the work for the feeble-minded is involved in the idea that cheap people will do well enough for their care. This idea is thoroughly wrong, vicious and misleading; purely as a financial consideration is the idea wrong, for not only does it require patience, tact and conscience, but a high grade of intelligence, and an abundant faith and sympathy with the pupils to produce tangible results from this training. Nor is the necessity for these qualifications confined to the school rooms, but they are required for every person under whose influence these people come. It is much easier for the caretakers to do for a pupil what he should do for himself, than it is to teach him through the tedious process of repetition how to do it, until he can be depended upon for it. A corps of people inspired with these qualities produce results, that within certain limits tend to reduce the expense and exertion required for their maintenance while under opposite conditions, the pupils would actually degenerate and thus become more helpless and require more care than at first.

It requires the best of people to give the best training, and only skilled people can maintain the standard.

I have said nothing about the girls. There are so many household and manufacturing employments that occupy the time and energies of the girls that there is not at the present time quite

the urgent demand for their segregation from the parent institute as for the boys.

Poultry raising and small fruit culture where climate will permit afford splendid colony industries for girls.

While the millennium of freedom from social degeneracy is still beyond our grasp, the Industrial Colony idea suggests welcome possibilities for a larger and more satisfactory, general segregation of defectives at a minimum of cost.
